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Michael Servetus

BY

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MICHAEL SERVETUS

OF many martyrs in the sacred cause of truth and reverent freedom of thought few have been more outspoken, more in advance of their time than was Michael Servetus. Had his influence prevailed the Reformation would have been more thorough, more in accord with the simple teaching of Christ than it proved itself to be. Luther on the one hand and Calvin on the other, basing their doctrines rather upon Augustine's great theological treatises than upon the Bible itself, nevertheless proceeded to erect an infallible Book into the place of an infallible Pope. But the Bible was only infallible, if interpreted according to their respective methods. Those who dared to differ from them were blasphemers and heretics. They were giants in their own days ; yet each was incapable of allowing to the great Spaniard, or to anyone else, that right of free inquiry upon which he acted himself. Neither

would suffer another to found a doctrinal system in strong opposition to his own. Hence both denounced Servetus in unmeasured terms, while one was the actively consenting party to his horrible death. He for his part refused to renounce his own deepest convictions in submission to the threats or arguments of the autocrat of Geneva, and he paid the penalty with his life for his Christian boldness. It is the object of this brief sketch to present a picture of the man himself, no less than to do honour to the high-souled martyr.

Of the early life of Miguel Serveto, or Michael Servetus, but little is known. He was born at Tudela in Navarre in 1511, being the son of Antonio Serveto de Reves,¹ a notary of Villanueva de Sigena, province of Huesca, and his wife Catalina Conesa. On both sides his family was of gentle blood; the family mansion is at Villanueva, and in the church of that town may be seen the family altar bearing its coat

¹ The true parentage of Servetus is given here by the kindness of the Rev. Alexander Gordon, and is published for the first time in England. To him also are owing chiefly the material and facts of this little biography. I am also grateful to him for revising and correcting the proof.—*A.W.F.*

of arms. Of the same stock probably was the noted ecclesiastic Marco Antonio Serveto de Reves. The boy would seem to have begun his education in one of the monasteries of his native province; from which he was sent by his father, who may have intended him to follow his own profession, to study law at the University of Toulouse, at that time famous throughout southern Europe. Here in 1528 he first began to study the Bible and laid the foundations of his later thought upon it. The sacred Book would shed a flood of light upon the corruptions of Christianity around him. Youth as he was, he brought no common powers to its interpretation. His keen scientific intellect blended with his penetrating spiritual insight made him a critic of unusual keenness and sobriety of judgment. At that time Luther had already made his mighty influence felt in Germany, while Calvin was pursuing the studies which led him to his high place in establishing the Reformation in Geneva. Curiously enough he also began as a student of law.

During his youth Servetus had already found a patron in the person of Juan de

Quintana, a Franciscan, who in 1530 became confessor to the Emperor Charles V. Their five years' intimacy inspired de Quintana with the highest respect for the natural gifts of the young student ; nor does he seem to have been overpoweringly shocked by his growing heresy. During the February of 1530 his patron took him in his train to Bologna, where he witnessed the coronation of his imperial master and had seen with his own eyes, in the streets, the Pope treading upon the necks of princes, and receiving homage from all the people on their bended knees. The keen, shrewd eyes of the young man gazed upon such a spectacle with the strongest detestation and contempt for the assumptions of the Papacy, which he never spared in his subsequent writings. Whether in the company of de Quintana or not he travelled to Lyons and Geneva, where Calvin had not yet taken up his abode. Youth as he was, at Basel during this journey he held at least one discussion with the Reformer Oecolampadius, in which he denied the two natures and pre-existence of Jesus as the Son of God. Such a controversy displayed great boldness in the young student, who

dared to hold his own against one of the most conspicuous theologians of his time. By way of Augsburg, where he may have actually seen Luther, he passed on to Strassburg, where he had an interview with two other Reformers, Bucer and Capito. To them he did not shrink from unfolding his views: no record survives of Capito's opinions upon them. But Calvin asserts that Bucer was so horrified with what he heard as to exclaim that such a man 'deserved to have his bowels plucked out and to be torn limb from limb.' Of such excesses even great theologians are capable.

In 1531, at the age of twenty, he was at Hagenau, where by means of John Setzer the printer he published his first work 'On the Errors of the Trinity,' written like the rest of his books in Latin. In style it is crude and a little barbarous, but it is marked by intense religious earnestness and distinguished by a wonderful display of learning for one so young. De Quintana, who described him as a youth of the greatest genius and a great sophist, read the treatise, recognizing the thought as that of Servetus, but deeming the style

to be too good for him. Thus in his earliest manhood he launched himself upon the theological world as an uncompromising reformer and excited a ferment of bitter hostility not only amongst the Catholics, but in the minds of the Protestant leaders. It must be confessed that the Catholics showed themselves less inclined to be vindictive and of a persecuting spirit than their opponents, who doubtless feared that the speculations of Servetus would have the effect of further discrediting the Reformation in their eyes. Oecolampadius in a letter to Bucer begged him to inform Luther that the obnoxious book was not published by the authority of the Swiss Reformers, adding the significant words, 'I entreat you to be specially watchful; and if you do it nowhere else, at least apologize for our churches in your confutation addressed to the Emperor, however this beast may have crept in among us.' Clearly the distinguished Reformer was afraid that Charles, who had no love of Luther and his followers, would visit his wrath upon the Swiss churches, if they did not disown the questionable treatise.

Unable to appreciate the genuine horror

which he had caused, but to modify the severity of the orthodox opposition, Servetus restated his positions in his 'Two Books of Dialogues concerning the Trinity,' which was published in 1532. But the amended form of his views brought him no greater sympathy than before, so firmly fixed in their faith were his opponents both amongst the Lutherans and the Calvinists. Curiously enough and perhaps acting upon the advice of Melanchthon, who, foreseeing that such a controversy would not forward the interests of the Reformation, had passed over the former treatise of Servetus in complete silence. He may also have been influenced by his contempt for an unknown intruder upon his own theological province. Melanchthon for his part, in a letter to Camerarius dated February 25th, 1532, remarks pathetically but with keen insight, 'With respect to the Trinity, you know I was always apprehensive that these things would sooner or later break out. Good God! what tragedies will this question excite among posterity—whether the Logos is an hypostasis, whether the Holy Ghost is an hypostasis? I satisfy myself with those words of Scripture,

which command us to invoke Christ, which is to attribute to him the honour of divinity, and is full of consolation.' So wrote the gentle and mighty scholar in anguish of heart : yet even he for all his learning would have found some difficulty in producing the 'words of Scripture,' upon which he relied. He shrank from all controversies upon fundamentals, from the ill effect, which he was confident would be produced upon the minds of Catholic thinkers.

At this period Servetus assumed the *nom de guerre* of *Villanovanus* or *de Villeneuve*, which he continued to use in the future. Under this name he retired to Lyons, where his scientific skill stood him in good stead, and he found employment in editing treatises of this kind for the eminent firm of the Trechsels. For them he was busily occupied in preparing a careful edition of the 'Geography of Ptolemy of Alexandria,' which was published in 1535, of which a second edition was printed in Vienne in 1542. His notes proved him to be one of the first comparative geographers of his own time. Nor had he travelled in vain : his penetrating

powers of observation had enabled him to give to the world many original facts concerning the modern nations which he had visited. In this work occurs the famous passage borrowed from Lorenz Friese, which had raised doubts of the veracity of Moses, and was used against him at his trial, when every scrap of evidence of heresy was seized upon greedily. Such an undertaking was a considerable achievement for so young a scholar, who had by no means confined his attention to similar subjects, and remains an enduring monument of careful research and laborious industry. At Lyons he found a new patron in the person of the famous physician, Dr. Symphorien Champier, perhaps better known under the latinized form of his name, Campegius, who inspired him with his own devotion to the medical profession and to its kindred studies.

Finding the theological world as yet unripe for his speculations, or at the very least determined to discountenance them severely, he resolved to be a physician. At that period the University of Paris held a foremost place in the opportunities afforded by it to pursue such and many other

branches of learning. Hence he was attracted thither in 1536. He soon found able tuition from the lips of Johan Günther, Jacques Dubois, and Jean Fernel. While the young student was quietly and patiently following out his researches, Calvin made a hurried visit to the French capital, when Servetus took the opportunity of consulting him ; nay, he even ventured to discuss theology with the great man. That was always a dangerous experiment for one to make, who differed from him fundamentally and was endowed with exceptionally keen powers of argument. From this time probably may be dated Calvin's repulsion towards his opponent, who was unwilling to bow down before his learning. Certainly after this first meeting, with earnest zeal he strove his hardest to keep a careful watch over Servetus to prevent him if possible from disseminating his heresies. But Calvin could not stay long enough in Paris to convert the heresiarch, who persisted in reading the Bible for himself without any preconceptions, and in thinking out its meaning as it presented itself to his sober and independent judgment.

So zealously did Servetus pursue the study of medicine, that he was elected to succeed Vesalius as assistant to Günther, in which capacity his lectures proved a source of great attraction. His old master did full justice to the extraordinary ability, the wide general culture, and the fine skill in dissection possessed by his pupil. Finally he extolled his assistant as 'scarce second to any in his knowledge of Galen,' whose researches then formed the foundation of medical training and were the criterion of medical orthodoxy. At Paris the great Spaniard found himself in a congenial atmosphere. He was able to indulge his boundless curiosity in the scientific school. He says that he graduated in arts, but of that no record remains in the university register. Here in 1537 he produced his most popular work on 'Syrups,' which gained him a high reputation amongst the physicians of Europe. The book ran through five editions, the last of which was published at Venice in 1548 consisting of Six Lectures on the Digestion, the fifth of which treated of 'Syrups.' In the midst of his varied labours he found time to lecture upon

Geometry and Astrology in their relation to medicine. His treatment of the last-named subject involved him in a legal action brought against him by the Medical Faculty in March, 1538, which he defended by counsel. Thus even in his own chosen profession his independence of thought brought him into conflict with its acknowledged leaders. The result of this diversion from his ordinary studies was a tract from his pen entitled 'An Apologetic Discussion on Astrology with a certain Physician by Michael Villanovanus,' which was published in Paris during the same year.

By this time his master Günther had died, a circumstance which caused him to leave Paris. Young as he was, the variety and scope of his investigations were remarkable, and he attained no mean distinction in each. For some unknown reason he proceeded to Avignon, where he practised medicine for a brief period, and thence to Charlieu where he stayed longer. But in 1540 we find him once more moving onward and resting for a time at Montpellier, where he undertook further study of his profession and may have taken a degree in that subject. In

this way he accumulated the experience of many universities and many teachers, till he derived unquestioned skill in his calling. But his interest in theology never slackened a whit : he had found, as he surely believed, a simpler and truer form of Christianity, and he could not be content with keeping his discovery to himself. His soul was burning with missionary fervour and he was preparing step by step to share the fruits of his speculations with the world.

Next year (1541) Pierre Paulmier, Archbishop of Vienne, who had been attracted to him by his lectures in Paris, invited him to become his confidential physician. Servetus readily accepted this honourable and not too onerous duty. In 1541 he settled in Vienne, remaining there until 1553, attending to the needs of his patron and practising in a private capacity with much success and a steadily growing reputation. In the meantime Luther had found words to characterize him, in company with his fellow heretic Campanus, and he made his onslaught with customary zeal and fiery vigour. The theologians of those days did not spare the feelings of their opponents, but heaped upon them

abusive and opprobrious epithets. As far as is known, Servetus made no reply to the strictures of his critics at this period, though he was laboriously preparing for publication his principal theological work.

At the same time he was no less busily employed in editing works for the Trechsel firm, amongst them Pagninus's Translation of the Bible, which was printed in 1542 at Lyons by Hugo a Porta. To this he contributed a remarkable preface and a few notes, which excited Calvin's angry repudiation. Amongst other matters he held that all of the prophecies of the Old Testament commonly applied to Jesus Christ, were in part fulfilled by some other person nearer the date of their utterance. He recognized, for example, that Cyrus was mentioned by the 'Second Isaiah' and actually called 'Jehovah's Messiah.' To him, if we may trust Calvin, he seems erroneously to have applied the fifty-third chapter, which brought upon him the fierce indignation of the Genevan scholar. Similarly in treating of the Psalms he utterly denied the application of any of them to Jesus Christ. The second Psalm, according to his view, referred to David's deliver-

ance from his foes. The twenty-second, which contains the passage 'they pierced my hands and my feet,' he ascribed to David's flight through the wilderness, where he suffered from this pain owing to the rocks and precipices in his path. Once more he applied the celebrated section of Isaiah vii. to Hezekiah. Such liberty in interpretation, which has quite a modern flavour, was extremely distasteful to the contemporary reformers, who would have either their own meaning of the words of the Bible or none. By it is clearly shown that Servetus brought independent thought and unfettered judgment to bear upon the Old Testament Scriptures. He would not suffer himself to be overmastered by the mighty influence of Augustine of Hippo. Some of his principles of investigation and some of his actual conclusions have long been widely though not universally accepted. But his freedom and its results only added fuel to the fire of his adversaries, which consumed him at the last.

Amid his editorial labours and his practice as a busy physician Servetus found time to devote himself to his favourite pursuit. Recognizing the well-earned re-

putation of Calvin as one of the two most conspicuous leaders of the Reformation, in 1545-6 he incurred the serious risk of entering upon a correspondence with him. Confident in the truth of his own thought, he may well have wished to convert his great opponent and gain his mighty influence to aid him in spreading his views through Europe. But he had untruly estimated his man: when we realize that the Senate of Geneva six years later passed a decree that Calvin's teaching was infallible, we can easily perceive that his conversion was an utter impossibility. But the correspondence ended in the ruin and death of Servetus: it may be that his language was as intemperate as Calvin's own, so that a personal no less than a public animosity was provoked in the mind of his adversary. A contemporary, Daniel Chamier, writes thus: 'Calvin not only professed a belief in the doctrine of the Trinity, but defended it with the greatest constancy, while the Papists were slumbering, among whom as long as Servetus lived, he lived in safety: but at length he was made by Calvin to feel the force of truth, and when he came to Geneva,

visited with a holy severity by the pious magistrates of that city.' So seriously does theological intolerance warp the judgment of an exceptionally fine scholar and a genuinely good man. Whatever we may think about Servetus being made 'to feel the force of truth,' we can but regard Calvin's treatment of him as an ineffaceable blot upon the career of that notable reformer, while the Genevan magistrates were guilty of an unholy and brutal murder.

Filled as he was with a resolute missionary zeal, Servetus sent on to Calvin the manuscript of a greatly enlarged edition of his theological tracts; at the same time he hinted at his desire to visit Geneva and argue the several points of dispute with Calvin. That was indeed a wish to put his head into the lion's mouth without any security of drawing it back in safety. The style of his writing may have been somewhat harsh and overconfident, since it stirred his correspondent to fierce wrath. On February 13th, 1546, Calvin replied 'more harshly than his custom was,' denouncing the contents of the manuscript in no measured terms, to

which Servetus may have replied in kind. About the same time he wrote to the heresy-hunting Guillaume Farel a strong letter, which contained the ominous and relentless passage : ' If he come, provided that my influence prevail, I will never suffer him to depart alive.' He knew that ' his influence would prevail,' but naturally he did not communicate so stern an intention to Servetus, who, however, from the tone of his last letter from Calvin plainly foresaw his probable fate, if he dared to beard the great theologian in his own place. During the next year he wrote to Abel Pouppin complaining that Calvin had treated him unfairly in persistently refusing to return him his manuscript, so that he had to do his work over again. He also added the prescient words, ' I am convinced that I must die for it.' Still he seems to have continued his correspondence with his opponent for a time, propounding a number of such questions as ' Was the man Jesus crucified the Son of God ; and what was the manner of this Sonship ? ' To these Calvin replied at a white heat ; but he did not satisfy his correspondent. Servetus had the audacity to disagree with

one unaccustomed to the slightest breath of opposition, and may have stated his reasons with some acerbity. At all events Calvin took a vehemently angry tone in his reply, which provoked recriminations no less severe upon the part of Servetus.

But the learned and enthusiastic Spaniard was not to be deterred from the publication of his work either by the heated reasoning of Calvin or by the ill-natured retention of his manuscript. By 1552 his 'Christianismi Restitutio' or 'Restoration of Christianity' was ready for the press, a fact which speaks much for the industry and earnestness of its author. He had chosen this title to express the purpose of his book, to replace Christianity in its primitive form, of which it had been robbed by the corruptions of centuries. By Calvin's powerful influence two Basel publishers, Jean Frellon and Marrinus, declined to take in hand the publication. But in spite of his efforts, sincere but bigoted, an edition of a thousand copies was printed at Vienne by Balthasar Arnollet. By January 3rd, 1553, the bulk of this impression was consigned secretly to be ready for the Easter book-sales at Lyons and

Frankfort. On February 26th of the same year Guillaume H. C. de Trye, formerly sheriff of Lyons under his cousin Antoine Arneys, inspired by an old grudge against the booksellers of his town, wrote to the authorities in that place enclosing a sheet of the printed book and revealing the authorship. Though this letter bears no signs of the dictation of Calvin, his hand may be traced in its production, while none save himself could have furnished the sheet in question. Moreover, it must be remembered that he was conscientiously eager to silence Servetus at all costs. His anxiety in this direction was further shown by a second letter of de Trye enclosing samples of the handwriting of Servetus, which Calvin professes to have 'furnished reluctantly.' Manifestly the two were acting in concert in their animosity against the daring heretic.

The larger part of the edition of this able and striking book was burned by the fiery zeal of the reformers, who could not bear to have their doctrinal conclusions disputed, and who were seriously alarmed at the effect of the book upon the minds of the Catholics. The age of religious

tolerance was not then ; nor is it complete in our own time. Two complete copies of the 'Christianismi Restitutio' are still known to exist, the one in Vienna, the other in Paris. The latter shows unmistakable traces of burning ; hence it is supposed on too slender grounds to have been the actual copy bound to its author, saved by some disciple when his master was burned at the stake. Far more probably it is a copy of the edition which was burned by the unwisdom of those who sought to refute its conclusions by its destruction. They had forgotten that thought cannot be burned in the flames, but endures safely garnered in the memory of mankind.

In the 'Christianismi Restitutio' Servetus proved the originality of his scientific researches by proclaiming his belief in the circulation of the blood. That great discovery is introduced by the way and does not form a part of the principal object of the book. Servetus set out to reinstate, if he could, the simpler and more primitive form of Christianity, which he believed to have been corrupted by the generations of the theologians. The book is divided into seven parts, the first and last treating

of the doctrine of the Trinity and the fifth made up of thirty letters to Calvin upon doctrinal points. These in themselves, as we find them in their place, could not fail to provoke alike the narrow zeal and the bitter wrath of him to whom they had been written with zealous purpose and in all good faith. It was owing to him that the authorship was discovered and that the author fell into danger of his life. By his inspiration the Inquisitor-General, Matthieu Ory, caused Servetus to be interrogated on his doctrines at Vienne on March 16th, 1553, and on April 4th he was arrested and cast into prison. On the two following days he underwent a severe examination, in which not overboldly he professed to have assumed the name of Servetus in his letters to Calvin for the purpose of carrying on a correspondence with him. But such a transparent pretext was of no avail to him and he was returned to his prison. Here, however, by the influence of the authorities, who recognized him to have practised medicine with success and to have led a blameless life, he appears to have been treated with consideration and kindness.

At four o'clock in the morning of April 7th, no doubt by secret connivance, he escaped from his prison. At first he was minded to go to Spain to find an asylum there amongst his own people. But he had not gone far on his way, when he turned back from fear of arrest. For four months he rested secure in some unknown hiding-place, finding himself safer amongst the Catholics than in the hands of the Protestants. He himself, who was most likely to know, declares that he never left France, while Calvin on the other hand positively asserts that he was wandering about through northern Italy. Calvin can hardly have been right in his assertion, since there was no reason for Servetus to have left Italy, when he had once arrived there. Upon his own showing he was on his way thither where he hoped to settle as a physician at Naples with his heretic compatriot, Juan de Valdes, when by some inexplicable infatuation he determined to pass through Geneva. He may have longed to visit the city of the reformers; he may even have been unwise enough to imagine either that he could convert Calvin, or win protection from him, Calvin

who was an autocrat of the autocrats and who had determined to bring him to untimely death.

Whatever his motives may have been, he rode into Louyset, a village on the French side of Geneva, on Saturday, August 12th, 1553. At this place, possibly to escape discovery, he abandoned his horse and proceeded on foot into the Swiss city, where he took up his quarters at the Rose Inn. He had no intention of staying where he was longer than he could avoid, as is shown by his attempt to obtain a boat on Sunday, August 13th, to help him on his way to Zürich, so that he might proceed at once to Italy. He failed in his attempt, no boat being obtainable till the next day. Whereupon, as needs he must, he attended afternoon service. During the worship he was immediately recognized by 'a few brothers,' as Calvin's sleuth-hounds are euphemistically described. Where they had seen him previously is not known; it was enough and more than enough for them, that their recollection of him played them no tricks. The same day, August 13th, Sabbath as it was, he was arrested and thrown into

prison. On the following day his trial began, which was protracted until October 26th of the same year. Thus it will be seen, that a considerable opportunity was afforded to him of recantation and confession of error. This may have been Calvin's doing in the hope of making so noted a convert. His nominal prosecutor was a henchman of Calvin's, some have said his cook, Nicholas de la Fontaine. Thirty-eight articles of accusation were drawn up against him, that no loophole might be left him for his heresy. Doubtless the thirty-seventh article told most heavily against him, which stated that 'in a printed book he had defamed the doctrine preached by Calvin,' which by a decree passed on November 9th, 1552, in Geneva, had been declared to be 'sacred and inviolable.' When one of two opponents not only deems his doctrine 'to be sacred and inviolable,' but persuades others to believe with him, there is little chance of life for the other, if he refuses to recant. Meanwhile on June 17th, the Civic Tribunal at Vienne had already commanded the noble heretic to be fined and burned alive. Such were the methods

of settling controversies in those cruel days.

The trial at Geneva dragged its slow length for several long and weary months : nor can its course be followed in detail. On the one side was Servetus standing alone against all arguments for what he believed to be true ; on the other were Calvin and his obedient army of judges. To some of the articles the defendant replied in the affirmative, while some of the charges he repudiated stoutly. He was one man against many, who were already convinced against him ; he was a man before his age, who suffered the consequences of his temerity. Amongst other charges brought against him were the opinions expressed in his notes to Ptolemy's ' Geography ' and Pagninus's Bible ; whilst his chief book excited the unfeigned horror of most of his judges. One harsh sentence from it aroused their wrath to an unwonted degree of fury, wherein he styled ' the Trinity as a Cerberean monster, a dream of St. Augustine, and an invention of the devil.' Besides he maddened Calvin and the rest by stigmatizing believers in that doctrine ' Atheists.' Nor can the extreme severity of his language be de-

fended, when it is realized that to the majority of the Christians of his day a belief in the doctrine of the Trinity was held to be essential to salvation. But his intensity of conviction led him to adopt strong and harsh terms, in the use of which Calvin himself was no mean proficient.

While the trial was proceeding, Balthasar Arnollet, who had printed the heretical work, being in no small fear for his own life, wrote a letter, which was produced in the court on August 21st. It may have been written with this object, though addressed to his friend James Bertet of Chatillon as early as July 14th. To clear himself, he wrote that Guérolt his assistant had corrected the proof of the book and concealed its heresies from him. At this point Calvin with all the ministers of Geneva entered the court, bringing with him some copies of the earlier Fathers of the Church, the use of which was allowed to Servetus, but without shaking his convictions. He was also provided with writing materials, that he might draw up a petition to his judges, which he may have presented on the following day, August 22nd. Nine days later, on August 31st,

a letter arrived from the authorities of Vienne thanking the Council of Geneva for apprehending and detaining Servetus, and begging them to send him back to receive his sentence and its execution in that place, a request which was refused : Calvin had got his prey too securely in the toils to be willing to let him go.

At the same time the great theologian drew up an able and ingenious reply to the prisoner. For his part Servetus merely wrote a few comments in the margin upon it and dared to express his contempt for its author. He even went so far as to say, ' In a cause so just I am firm, and have not the least fear of death.' With a man possessed of such strength of conviction and of a courage so undaunted there was no longer any possibility of prevailing by gentler measures, and on October 26th, he was sentenced to be burned alive. No law then in force in Geneva admitted of the enactment of a capital sentence. In 1535 all the old laws concerning religion had been set aside there, the only punishment being banishment. Still the Swiss churches joined in condemning the heretic, but were silent upon the matter and manner

of his punishment, which some of them hardly expected to be carried to extremities. His judges therefore had recourse to an old edict in the Code of Justinian to support them in their cruel purpose. Calvin too, though zealous for the death sentence, seems to have wished his victim to have been beheaded, as the more merciful method of making an end of him ; but for once he was overruled.

Thus after long weeks of anxious waiting Servetus, who had held his own against his accusers and defended himself with spirit and courage, was condemned to what Calvin rightly called ' a barbarous kind of punishment.' One of his chief sins appears to have been his ascription of the term ' Trinitarians ' to those who accepted the doctrine of the Trinity, who claimed the more general name of Christians. His sentence ends thus : ' Having God, and his Holy Scripture before our eyes, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by this our definitive sentence, which we here give in writing, we condemn thee, Michael Servetus, to be bound, and carried to the Lieu de Champel, and there tied to a stake, and burned alive

with thy book, written with thine own hand, and printed, till thy body is reduced to ashes: and thus shalt thou end thy days, to serve as a warning to others, who are disposed to act in the same manner. And we command you, our Lieutenant, to cause our present sentence to be carried into effect.' With this terrible pronouncement ringing in his ears Michael Servetus was led back to his cell with the certain knowledge that he was to suffer on the morrow. Farel, in this kindlier than his wont, appears to have visited him in the prison on October 27th to try to induce him to recant. But he pleaded in vain; Servetus was too true to himself to play the coward at the last moment.

He was led forth to the place of execution, where he at once threw himself down in fervent prayer to God, and remained long enough on the ground to excite the impatience of his persecutors. Afterwards, in spite of the earnest entreaties of Farel, he continued silent, by what Calvin after his own fashion calls 'his brutish obstinacy.' The pile was built of wood, much of which was actually green and unready to take fire. Upon it Servetus was set and bound

to the trunk of a tree set upright by an iron chain. A rope was loosely twisted round his neck, and his book was fastened to his thigh. Here in the face of a great multitude he endured terrible physical torments for an hour, some say for two, until death came to his rescue. So he remained constant to the truth as he saw it in the midst of excruciating bodily anguish, and by his heroism many were gained over to his opinions. Better is a 'brutish obstinacy' of this kind in the victim than the conduct of his chief persecutor.

Of Calvin's part in this tragedy no sound defence can be made. To marvellous ability and fervid religious zeal he added the bigotry of his age, with a touch of personal animosity to Servetus. He could not bear to have his authority disputed, nor could he endure the plain language used to him and of him by his victim. Doubtless the Genevan autocrat, who was also one of the greatest of Christian theologians, was influenced by the persecuting spirit of his age. Mighty man as he was, in this one instance he showed himself cruel and vindictive. He had much provocation, no doubt; but he was not great enough to rise superior to

it. We may leave him then with this solitary considerable blot upon a character otherwise noble and great. Time has avenged Servetus: one of Calvin's successors at Geneva is theologically a somewhat advanced Unitarian, while the successors of those who burned the true-hearted Spaniard have set up a huge block of stone upon the hillock of Champel to commemorate his memory. That he was a great man and an acute thinker none can deny; that he was a martyr for the truth is no less indisputable. He was done to death by the pitiless sentences of the men of his day, whose successors at Geneva have never committed a similar crime.

It is by no means easy to sum up the beliefs of the Spanish physician briefly and at the same time coherently. He held that there was one God only; but somehow Jesus partook of 'the Substance of the Father' in his birth from the Virgin Mary, which he accepted as an historical fact. In his earlier days his thought bore much resemblance to that of the later thinker, Laelius Socinus. He cannot be claimed as an Arian, though he accepted the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ. His notes on

the Bible which he edited, display opinions far in advance of contemporary Christian thought. Markedly in his interpretation of the Prophets and Psalms, he held, as a considerable band of scholars maintains to-day, that they applied to the men of their own time while having their complete and spiritual sense only as applied to Jesus. Moreover, of the humanity of Jesus he was firmly convinced, and rejected alike the commonly received doctrines of the Atonement and Incarnation. Of his writings some account has been given in the course of the foregoing sketch : they were varied, original, and deeply interesting from many points of view. In science, criticism, geography, and theology he led the way for the more advanced thinkers of a later period. His energy was untiring, his faculty of research keen and penetrating. His judgment was sober and for the most part unbiased by previous theological thought. He was an independent thinker who came to his own conclusions from the evidence before him. For the boldness of his opinions he paid the penalty of his life, and his memory must ever be cherished by those to whom truth and freedom are of

supreme import. Unitarian martyr as he was, his example remains clear and bright to those more timorous souls, who, under the force of old associations, are false to themselves by remaining in a circle of thought beyond which they have really passed.

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